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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 002221

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

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TAGS: IS LE PGOV PTER SY

SUBJECT: MGLE01: JA'JA SEES "SMALL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY"

WITH HIZBALLAH; MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WITH HARIRI

REF: BEIRUT 2171

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C/NF) On June 29, the Ambassador and econoff met with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'Ja and his adviser Elie Khoury at the Embassy. Ja'Ja was upbeat about the day's National Dialogue session, saying that Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah was restrained. Nasrallah, along with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, pledged that there would be no attacks along the Blue Line during Israel's military operation in Gaza. Regarding Hizballah's arms, Ja'Ja saw a "small window of opportunity" when Nasrallah seemed to acquiesce to a plan to strengthen the Lebanese state until Hizballah's arms were no longer needed. Ja'Ja was critical of MP Michel Aoun, who contributed nothing to the discussion. However, Ja'Ja was open to a rapprochement with Aoun and suggested including him in the government by giving him the three cabinet positions currently reserved for pro-President Lahoud ministers. Ja'Ja was concerned about growing Christian tensions with MP Saad Hariri. He saw Hariri's attempts to expand the ISF intelligence branch and appoint his own man to head it as an attempt to usurp the mission of the traditionally Christian LAF G-2. Ja'Ja considered the Israeli operation in Gaza as having bad implications for Lebanon, but speculated that Hizballah was working to calm the situation. Finally, Ja'Ja and Khoury raised the case of former Lebanese Forces intelligence chief Ghassan Touma, currently living in the U.S. End Summary.

HIZBALLAH MILD AT
NATIONAL DIALOGUE

¶12. (C/NF) On June 29, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'Ja and his adviser Elie Khoury arrived in secret to the Embassy for a meeting with the Ambassador and econoff. Ja'Ja was upbeat about the day's National Dialogue session. Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah did not use the Israeli

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military operations in Gaza to say "we are right" about Israel. Instead, Nasrallah was restrained during the meeting. Ja'Ja said he had a gut feeling that Hizballah is looking for a way to relax the current confessional tensions.

¶13. (C/NF) Regarding Hizballah's arms, Ja'Ja saw a "small window of opportunity." The discussion centered around first building up a strong state, and then the need for Hizballah's

arms would grow less and less. Ja'Ja promised the meeting participants that he would prepare a proposal for the next session on July 25 that would move this idea forward. He was pleasantly surprised when he pulled Nasrallah aside at the end of the meeting and asked: "Did I get this right?" Nasrallah simply replied, "yes."

¶ 14. (C/NF) Ja'Ja was also pleased when Nasrallah and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri promised to not hold an operation against Israel along the Blue Line during Israel's military operation into Gaza. Nasrallah gave his word to the dialogue participants that nothing would happen from southern Lebanon against Israel. He also called for the army and security forces to keep an eye on Palestinian militants. Nasrallah asked, however, that his pledge not be made public to avoid giving Palestinian militants a reason to start trouble along the Blue Line. Overall, Nasrallah's demeanor was neither passive nor aggressive, according to Ja'Ja. Berri, too, was relatively quiet. When asked about his recent trip to Damascus, Berri simply replied that it was positive, and added no details.

AOUN CONTRIBUTES LITTLE

¶ 15. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked Ja'Ja how MP Michel Aoun behaved at the dialogue. Ja'Ja replied contemptuously that Aoun did nothing; he has no plan. Aoun said: "It is not important to have arms, but who is the one who orders arms in or out." Ja'Ja interpreted Aoun's statement to mean that the GOL must decide.

¶ 16. (C/NF) Ja'Ja was critical of Aoun in general, saying that Aoun has no overall strategy. Aoun simply opens rhetorical fire on Saad Hariri all the time. However, Ja'Ja said that he was willing to compromise with Aoun. He even

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suggested that Aoun could be brought into the Cabinet by giving him the three minister slots currently reserved for President Emile Lahoud. The Ambassador pointed out that doing so would cause the March 14 majority to lose two votes in cabinet since Defense Minister Elias Murr and Charles Rizk have become de facto allies of March 14 (the insufferable Minister of Environment Yacoub Sarraf is still Lahoud's man). Ja'Ja said that bringing in Aoun would still be worth it. Ja'Ja even admitted that it was March 14 who excluded Aoun when he returned to Lebanon, not the other way around. Aoun would be like Hezbollah: out of government they were always critical, but once inside "they shut up."

ISF CHANGES ARE A MICROCOSM OF HARIRI-CHRISTIAN TENSIONS

¶ 17. (C/NF) Ja'Ja reported that prior to the June 29 National Dialogue session, he and other March 14 leaders met with Hariri to address Christian tensions over Hariri's security appointments. Ja'Ja denied that March 14 Christians are drifting away from Hariri. He believed March 14 could stay together until President Lahoud's term ends in November 2007. However, he saw the issue of Internal Security Forces (ISF) appointments as a serious one representing Christian concerns that Sunnis were taking more than their fair share of government jobs. "It just adds to the Christian losses of the last 15 years" and drives Aoun crazy, asserted Ja'Ja.

¶ 18. (C/NF) Ja'Ja was alarmed that Hariri wanted to appoint his own man, Lt. Col. Wissam al-Hassan, to head the ISF intelligence branch. Ja'Ja is worried that Hariri intends to expand the size and mission of the traditionally Sunni ISF intelligence branch to make it into a peer competitor with the traditionally Christian Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) G-2 and the traditionally Shia Surete General. Hariri wants a Cabinet decree to upgrade the ISF intelligence branch from to a section, which is bigger than a branch. Ja'Ja raised his concerns with Hariri, who replied that the ISF intelligence

always had a branch. Ja'Ja replied that Hariri wants to upgrade to a section, which constitutes a legal change. Hairi did not seem to register the distinction, which Ja'Ja interpreted as Hariri's lack of a grasp of details.

¶9. (C/NF) Hariri's appointment of someone so close to him to head the ISF intelligence branch, as well as his proposal to expand it to a section, is causing serious discord and anxiety in the ISF and LAF, according to Ja'Ja. He was concerned that the LAF will feel threatened and draw closer to President Lahoud. Christian LAF officers are alarmed because they fear Hariri is trying to create his own (Sunni-led) G-2. The Ambassador pointed out that ISF commander Maj. Gen. Rifi tends to make a good impression on visitors as professional and capable, while LAF G-2 commander George Khoury comes across as unprofessional and a complainer. Ja'Ja sighed in agreement. But, he continued, we are stuck with the LAF officers we have because the president is the patron of the LAF. Ja'Ja added that it seems LAF commander Lt. Gen. Michel Sulayman still maintains his Syrian ties.

¶10. (C/NF) Ja'Ja added that he has talked with Maronite ministers Pierre Gemayel and Nayla Mouawad, and they agree that Hariri is very stubborn. They are paying a high political price with their Christian constituents because of Hariri. This is exacerbated by the Siniora-Hariri rift. Hariri can be managed, clarified Ja'Ja, but Prime Minister Siniora acts as if he is head of state. "He is a one-man show," asserted Ja'Ja. Siniora is not consulting anyone else on civil service appointments, including the foreign ministry. Siniora does not want to share power, according to Ja'Ja. He will listen to others, but once he has taken a decision, he is very stubborn.

¶11. (C/NF) Ja'Ja said that Hariri was very upset about Mufti of the Republic Qabbani's charges that the ISF was mistreating those arrested after the February 5 riots (reftel). According to Ja'Ja, Hariri called Qabbani and told him that if he has a concern, to call Hariri, and not make a public statement. Ja'Ja added that he does not envy Hariri on this issue because Qabbani is unreliable, but it is too difficult to remove from his position as Mufti of the Republic.

GAZA OPERATION "BAD"

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¶12. (C/NF) Ja'Ja raised the fighting in Gaza, saying that the Israeli actions would be bad for Lebanon and the region. He noted, however, that there has been no significant reaction inside Lebanon. He speculated that Hizballah may be playing a calming role. By contrast, Ja'Ja was in favor of the Israeli Air Force's buzzing of Syrian President Bashar Asad's summer home. It is good that the Syrians know they are accountable, said Ja'Ja.

"ACCIDENTAL TORTURE"

¶13. (C/NF) At the close of the meeting, Ja'Ja and Khoury asked the Ambassador to look into the case of Ghassan Touma, the chief of Lebanese Forces intelligence during the civil war. Ja'Ja said that Touma is living in the U.S. but has no legal status. He cannot take airline flights because he is on a TSA no-fly list, according to Ja'Ja. Touma was convicted of war crimes in a Lebanese court in 1993, so he cannot return to Lebanon. Ja'Ja and Khoury disputed reports that Touma had tortured prisoners during the civil war, which they said came from Canadian intelligence. "He sometimes did only what was necessary to take confessions...but he is not that type," said Ja'Ja, adding that Touma was held to standards of conduct, "as if this were Switzerland." Khoury unhelpfully added: "Sometimes there is accidental torture, but I don't think Touma did it." The Ambassador said he would look into the case, but emphasized he could not make

any guarantees.
FELTMAN